

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00 PA-01

USIA-06 PRS-01 SP-02 PM-03 NSC-05 SS-15 IO-10 /061 W

----- 097009

R 082249Z JUL 75

FM AMEMBASSY MEXICO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8775

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE MEXICO 6052

EO 11652: NA

TAGS: PFOR, MX

SUBJECT: LEA'S TRAVELS: IS THIS TRIP REALLY NECESSARY?

1. DESPITE THE FAWNING AND HOOPLA WITH WHICH PRES. ECHEVERRIA'S TRICONTINENTAL TRIP WAS LAUNCHED, BY NO MEANS EVERYONE IN MEXICO IS CONVINCED THAT HIS 42-DAY ABSENCE FROM THE COUNTRY IS A GOOD THING. PRIVATELY, MORE THAN A FEW MEXICANS HAVE EXPRESSED CONCERN AT THE SIZE OF HIS ENTOURAGE (SOME 200-ODD WITH HANGERS-ON), ITS COSTS, ITS DUBIOUS PURPOSES, AND ITS INTERRUPTION OF ONGOING GOVERNMENTAL WORK AT HOME.

2. A FEW BRAVE SOULS HAVE CUTIOUSLY EXPRESSED THEIR MISGIVINGS IN PRINT IN RECENT DAYS, USUALLY IN OBLIQUE FASHION BY UNDER-SCORING PRESSING PROBLEMS WHICH THE PRESIDENT WILL BE LEAVING BEHIND. A NOTABLE EXAMPLE WAS A COLUMN IN INFLUENTIAL "EXCELSIRO" JULY 8 BY SAMUEL DEL VILLAR. WITH DEFT SARCASM, DEL VILLAR:

-- PRESUMES ECHEVERRIA TRIP MUST BE EXTRAORDINARILY IMPORTANT TO MEXICO'S INTERESTS, SINCE OTHERWISE PRESIDENT'S LENGTHY ABSENCE DURING PERIOD OF ECONOMIC DIFFICULTY AND POLITICAL SENSITIVITY WOULD NOT BE JUSTIFIED.

-- DESCRIBES AS "ABSURD" THE NOTION THAT MEXICO FACES ANY SORT OF CRISIS SO SERIOUS THAT IT COULD WEAKEN THE SYSTEM'S STABILITY UNLESS PRESIDENT WERE ON HAND TO DEAL WITH IT.

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-- NOTES NEVERTHELESS THAT TRADE DEFICIT HAS BECOME SO SERIOUS

THAT EMERGENCY MEASURES MAY SOON BE REQUIRED, AND THAT POLITICALLY THIS PORTION OF EACH PRESIDENT'S TERM (WHEN HIS SUCCESSOR IS CHOSEN) IS FAR AND AWAY THE MOST DELICATE.

-- DISMISSES AS "FRIVOLOUS" THE EXPLANATION THAT THE TRIP'S PURPOSE LIES IN ADVANCING ECHEVERRIA'S CANDIDACY FOR UN SECRETARY GENERALSHIP, OBSERVING THAT THE PRESIDENT HAD HIMSELF ALREADY DISMISSED HIS CHANCES FOR THAT POST.

-- SIMILARLY DOWNPLAYS TRIP'S VALUE IN TERMS OF IMPROVING MEXICO'S IMAGE ABROAD, SINCE PREVIOUS TRIPS HAVE OBVIOUSLY LEFT LITTLE MORE THAN MOST GENERAL IMPRESSION OF THIS COUNTRY'S POLICIES AND PURPOSES.

-- CONCLUDES THAT PRIME JUSTIFICATION MUST LIE IN PROSPECTS FOR CLOSER TIES WITH OPEC COUNTRIES, TIES WHICH REQUIRE THE PERSONAL ATTENTION OF THE PRESIDENT (AND THE MOST EXPENSIVE TRIP TO DATE) TO SOLIDIFY, AND WHICH MIGHT BE EXPECTED TO HELP MEXICO OUT OF ITS CURRENT ECONOMIC DIFFICULTIES.

3. COMMENT: WE CANNOT HELP BUT AGREE WITH DEL VILLAR'S IMPLICATIONS THAT THE PRESIDENT'S SIX-WEEK ABSENCE FROM HIS POST DURING A PERIOD OF GROWING ECONOMIC STRAINS AND INTENSE POLITICAL MANEUVERING SUCH AS THE PRESENT ONE REFLECTS AN ATTITUDE OF SUPREME SELF-CONFIDENCE -- IF NOT OUTRIGHT ARROGANCE.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: PRESS COMMENTS, CHIEF OF STATE VISITS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 08 JUL 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: GolinoFR
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975MEXICO06052
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750236-0350
From: MEXICO
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19750777/aaaacqzq.tel
Line Count: 88
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION ARA
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: GolinoFR
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 10 SEP 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <10 SEP 2003 by BoyleJA>; APPROVED <11 SEP 2003 by GolinoFR>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
06 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: LEA'S TRAVELS: IS THIS TRIP REALLY NECESSARY?
TAGS: PFOR, PINT, MX, EXCELSIOR, (ECHEVERRIA ALVAREZ, LUIS), (DEL VILLAR, SAMUEL)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 06 JUL 2006